DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 183 CS 509 109

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TITLE The Importance of Minority Role Models in Higher Education Mass Communication Curriculum.
PUB DATE Feb 93
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the National Association of African-American Studies Conference (Petersburg, VA, February 9-13, 1993).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Black Students; Broadcast Journalism; College Curriculum; *Cultural Awareness; Higher Education; *Mass Media; *Multicultural Education; News Reporting; *Racial Bias; Role Models; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS *African Americans; *Southern Arkansas University

ABSTRACT

The broadcast journalism sequence at Southern Arkansas University allows African-American students as many opportunities as possible to review role models from different perspectives. The school has an enrollment of 18% Black students. Each area studied in the introduction to mass media course involves sections dealing with multicultural and African-American perspectives on matters relating to broadcasting. In this regard, television is an essential teaching tool because it refracts many societal concerns and effects. Controversial issues of public importance involving the African-American community can be shown and discussed with students, in addition to serving as a jumping-off point for research papers. A number of TV clips can be used to illustrate these points, such as: (1) the death of Arthur Ashe, who was buried in Richmond, Virginia, brings up important reporting ethical questions for students; (2) music performed by some African-American musical groups such as 2 Live Crew raise questions about censorship; (3) coverage of the Los Angeles riots raise critical questions about the media's cultural orientation; and (4) a look at how the media in the 1960s treated a figure like Malcolm X exposes students to a figure they have probably seldom seen. (TB)

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ED 391 183

National Association of African-American Studies Conference
February 9-13, 1993
Petersburg, Virginia

"The Importance of Minority Role Models in a Higher Education Mass Communication Curriculum."

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Instructional leaders in higher education must ensure that course offerings include the richness and scope of African-American contributions in all fields. This presentation will discuss how minority role models are introduced into all courses in the mass communication sequence at Southern Arkansas University.

A script consisting of voiceovers from an edited videotape follows this page. It has been modified from the traditional half-page audio and video television scripting format to allow for easier readability. VHS copies of the edited videotape are available upon request.

(VOICEOVER ONE)

Southern Arkansas University, founded in 1909, is a state-supported institution of approximately 2500 students. About 18 percent of the student population is African-American, and many are Broadcast Journalism majors. Magnolia, Arkansas is located in a rural southwestern portion of the state, two hours from Little Rock and 90 minutes from Shreveport, Louisiana, the closest television news markets. It is a largely agrarian environment where long distances to major markets make it difficult to schedule regular guest speakers or field trips. Under these circumstances, how can African-American broadcast journalism majors gain a perspective on role models in mass communication? This program will chronicle the ways by which the broadcast journalism sequence at Southern Arkansas University allows African-American students as many opportunities as possible to analyze role models from a number of perspectives. The first required course for broadcast journalism majors is Introduction to Mass Media, which primarily focuses on issues in mass communication. Each area studied in the course involves sections dealing with multicultural and African-American perspectives on matters related to broadcasting. Television is an essential teaching tool here, as it serves to refract many societal concerns and effects. Controversial issues of public importance involving the African-American community can be shown and discussed with students, in addition to serving as a jumping-off point for

research papers. Critical thinking skills are important in these cases, and viewing subjects relevant to African-Americans gives introductory students of all races proper bases of analysis for future courses they will take in the broadcast journalism sequence. For example, the 1990 Andy Rooney controversy was an important one to discuss in class, as it showed that even civil rights advocates can stumble when it comes to personal viewpoints.

(VOICEOVER TWO)

The death of Arthur Ashe, who was laid to rest in Richmond, Virginia earlier this week, brought up two important reporting ethical questions for students. How did a role model such as Ashe deal with the specter of having his illness "outed" by USA Today? Additionally, how was his extraordinary dignity under such circumstances viewed by the American mass media?

(VOICEOVER THREE)

Music performed by a few African-American groups has been viewed as objectionable material in some quarters. Censorship is often the answer by critics to the artistic freedom of these musical artists. Here are two examples students viewed in class pertaining to the 2 Live Crew album "As Nasty As They Wanna Be" and Ice-T's "Cop Killer."

(VOICEOVER FOUR)

Media self-analysis of its role in fostering racial tension has been the subject of much research by students in both introductory and advanced broadcast journalism courses. There was no greater introspection by reporters, particularly those who work in television, concerning their roles in covering the 1992 Los Angeles riots. Critical analysis of media coverage by students is necessary to understand why an African-American perspective in the Rodney King case may differ from those of Caucasians or immigrants.

(VOICEOVER FIVE)

Seeing how African-American leaders like Malcolm X were viewed by the mainstream media in the 1960s gives students a chance to see an individual they have seen little of.

(VOICEOVER SIX)

The specific topic of minority role models has been addressed on some television talk programs. Here, the subject for discussion is whether or not The Cosby Show accurately reflects the African-American lifestyle.

(VOICEOVER SEVEN)

The area of television advertising has become one in which many African-Americans are featured, Michael Jordan in particular. But

a new advertising format is drawing a great deal of attention towards the needs of African-American consumers. Infomercials, in reality 30-minute television commercials, are featuring minorities as hosts and distributors of various products.

(VOICEOVER EIGHT)

For broadcast journalism majors to be as well-rounded as possible professionally upon graduation, they must perform a number of newswriting and producing assignments in all courses. Role models from local network news affiliates give majors an opportunity to critique their overall performances, in addition to chronicling minority hiring patterns at these stations. Of particular importance here is making sure African-American students understand how they may be viewed in a largely Caucasian marketplace. Videotapes from African-American professionals in broadcasting and print journalism show that while there has been progress in hiring and promotion, a glass ceiling still exists in some areas.

(VOICEOVER NINE)

Students enrolled in the Southern Arkansas University Advanced Electronic News Gathering course have unique opportunities to see their reports viewed by a wide audience. Student-produced university news reports are seen on KTVE-TV, the NBC affiliate in Monroe, Louisiana. They are also seen on AgNet, a national

satellite network in Houston, Texas. African-American students are able to see how careers of minority students who preceded them were launched in part from the exposure their television reports produced.

(VOICEOVER TEN)

As you have seen, the broadcast journalism sequence at Southern Arkansas University has been tailored to address the needs and concerns of African-American majors. Classroom critical thinking skills, media role models, real-world assignments and numerous research papers allow African-American students to enhance their marketability. Graduates have on to successful careers in broadcasting or have entered graduate schools in the region. "The Importance of Minority Role Models in a Higher Education Mass Communication Curriculum" is a subject which must be addressed in broadcast journalism courses. The results give all college and university students, regardless of race, greater perspective on issues which they will be reporting on at some time in their professional careers.